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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

Wednesday, October 25, 1944

Subject: "Community Sewing Center." Information from Extension specialists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

You may not believe it--but here's actually a story about a good neighbor that has nothing at all to do with the international situation! It does deal with a situation though--the wartime clothing problem.

THAT really was a problem in East Burke, Vermont, awhile back. Stocks of yard goods and ready-made clothing just about went into an eclipse! Mothers of small fry were keeping their fingers crossed; just hoping, you know, that Juniors and Janes wouldn't take a sudden spurt of growing. After all, they couldn't--well--at least--they wouldn't want to put them to bed and keep them there all winter. Fortunately they didn't have to --because--Mrs. Stella Farmer stepped into the picture.

Her solution to the problem was a practical bit of Americana--remodeling "hand-me-downs."

You see, Mrs. Farmer was clothing leader for her local home demonstration club. As a matter of fact, she was practically the town tailor by popular demand. That was the result of her native knack with a needle. Several years of training in clothing construction and tailoring helped a little too. Anyway, by the fall of 1942, she was distributing her time among three principal interests. Those were her family, her sewing room, and her club. As club president, she thought the club should do something to help ALL the women in the community solve their wartime clothing problems. She suggested that the club sponsor a community sewing center. Her idea was to have a place where all the women in the community could come for assistance with their sewing. And--she even offered to provide that assistance herself.

Plans were soon afoot to put her suggestion into effect. The county home demonstration agent and the state extension clothing leader agreed to come to East Burke to conduct the first sewing clinic. Arrangements were made for an all-day meeting at the Community House. All women with problems in making or remaking children's clothing were urged to attend. Women with children were sent special notices; club women seconded the written invitation with a personal one; and 4-H Club members also helped get the word around. Each woman, of course, was asked to bring something to sew on. Club members arranged for sewing machines, and Mrs. Farmer brought an assortment of patterns she had on hand.

You'd be surprised at the amount of sewing that was done at that first meeting by the 12 women who attended. Children's garments were cut from new or old materials; women's dresses were fitted; an old coat was remodeled into a child's coat; all kinds of help was given by the clothing specialists and Mrs. Farmer.

After that first meeting, 25 additional ones were conducted by Mrs. Farmer. A total of 21 different women received help at the sewing center with an average of seven attending each meeting.

Mrs. Farmer's record of the 25 sewing sessions show that 77 garments were made or remodeled. These included tailored coats, jackets and capes; women's slips and housedresses; boy's suits, blouses, and shirts; and girls' slips, dickeys, pinafores, skirts, and dresses. Mrs. Farmer also demonstrated the use of sewing-machine attachments, and short cuts in sewing.

There is only one Mrs. Farmer, the folks in East Burke, Vermont will tell you. But— there are other examples of similar good-neighbor activities in many states. In Arkansas, for example, home demonstration clothing leaders conducted sewing bees which they called "Crippled clothes clinic."

And in Ohio, Montana, Connecticut, and Kansas--names for similar sewing sessions ranged from "clothes workshops" to "dressmaking schools."

The moral, of course, is that what can be done in the East Burke or Ohio or Arkansas, you can do too. Sewing bees are an old American custom that you can revive any time.

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